

tween the 24-year-old Mexican immigrant and the streets.

Martinez, who lives New Brunswick, has one thing to blame for those itchy glass fragments, and for much of the other misfortune that has descended upon her, too: her daily commute to work.

On Jan. 15, 1996, Martinez was among 17 people squeezed into a passenger van built for half as many riders. It was an illegal shuttle service, one that routinely whisked workers home after shifts at a Herrod Boulevard warehouse.

Martinez and the others had just piled into the vehicle when another van — one equally jammed with immigrant workers — slammed into hers. Their van had no seat belts to lessen the injuries.

"It was terrible. Terrible," Martinez



the photo above was broadsided by another van in South Brunswick on Jan. 15, 1996. At left, Lt. Thomas Earley of the New Brunswick police questions independent van-pool driver Carlos Palacios after pulling him over during spot checks on the John Lynch Bridge.

Courtesy Department of Transportation/1996(ABOVE) JOE MCLAUGHLIN/Staff photographer/1997(AT LEFT)

said recently through a Spanish-speaking translator. "I thank God we all lived."

Indeed, that nobody was killed was miraculous. Yet almost as amazing was that such a wreck hadn't happened

sooner.

Central New Jersey is teeming with dozens of illegal vans and minibuses just like the ones that clobbered Martinez. As unsafe as the ride pools may be, thousands of low-skilled, temporary

workers — many of whom are illegal aliens — rely on them to get to local factories and warehouses each day.

"There are a lot of illegal vehicles

Please see **Vans**, page A4

electricity, said Paul Rosengren, a PSE&G spokesman. Everything should be restored by midnight, he said.

"It's tricky in (Middlesex, Somerset and Union counties) because the outages were widespread and scattered — not concentrated in an area," Rosengren said. "In many towns, at least one wire was brought down by trees."

Tricky or not, this weekend wasn't cool for powerless homeowners.

"Considering it's one of the hottest days, and there's no power to even turn on a fan, it's not real pleasant," Hansen said yesterday. "We're just waiting it out."

A tree that fell Saturday evening

Please see **Outages**, page A2

PCB LEVELS POSE HEALTH THREAT

Tainted local fish may cause illness

By SARAH GREENBLATT
STAFF WRITER

While federal officials plan to clean up a polluted South Plainfield property, some health and environmental experts say contamination may have already sickened people.

The U.S. Environmental Protec-

tion Agency announced last week that the Hamilton Industrial Park will be placed on the National Priorities List for extensive cleanup of polychlorinated biphenyls.

The announcement came after the EPA found hazardous levels of PCBs in fish in the Bound Brook, which crosses the 25-acre property, and in Piscataway's New Market Pond, into which the brook flows.

Tissue samples from the carp, lar-

gemouth bass, white suckers and sunfish tested contained PCB levels as high as 36 parts per million, with an average reading of 7 parts per million. Federal guidelines set the safe limit for consumption of PCBs in food at 2 parts per million.

In an advisory issued last week warning against eating fish from the Bound Brook and New Market

Please see **Fish**, page A2



● Signs warn people to not eat PCB-laden fish from New Market Lake in Piscataway. High levels of the toxic substance were also found in fish in the Bound Brook, which flows into the pond.

DICK COSTELLO
Staff photographer

Weather

Cloudy: Chance of morning rain, high in upper 70s; clear, cool tonight. PAGE A2



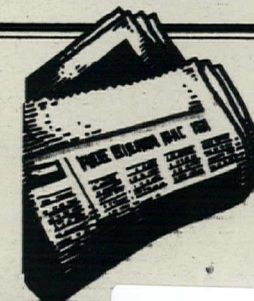
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OUTAGES: Storms leave many powerless to cool off

■ Continued from page A1

on Olive Street, where Hansen lives, took down wires with it and caused an outage in a few homes. Olive Street has been closed off as a result.

Other parts of Branchburg also

were without power, police said. Most other municipalities in Union, Somerset and Middlesex counties reported minor storm damage.

Hansen said police put up cones and a GPU worker separated the fallen tree from the wires, but nothing more

was done yesterday. "They just tell us we're on the list of people they've got to get to," she said.

"It's frustrating — I'm too tired to yell. You call them, and you get the same answers," she said.

Sue Hohenadel, a spokeswoman for

GPU, said of the power-restoration effort: "We'll have to wait and see. We have our crews (out there), and we're calling foreign crews from New York.

"We're hoping for the best and calling in (crews) as we need them — for as long as it takes to get the power back," she said.

FISH: PCB levels called cause for public health concerns

■ Continued from page A1

Pond, EPA and state Department of Environmental Protection officials said the chief health risk is to long-time consumers of species found in those waters.

But other experts say that even small amounts of the tainted fish can be hazardous.

"Those readings are amazingly high," said Bob Tucker, director of the Eco-Policy Center at Rutgers University.

Tucker said the highest PCB reading in fish that he can recall from his 18-year tenure with the DEP was 12 ppm found in American eels tested in the Hudson-Raritan Estuary.

Taken in the 1980s, those readings prompted the DEP to close the estuary to commercial fishers, Tucker said.

PCBs are oily chemicals used as coolants and lubricants in electrical

equipment until 1977, when they were banned because they damage the kidney and immune system, may cause cancer, and can cause slow development of fetuses and children.

Tucker said even low levels of exposure could damage the DNA of some individuals.

"You cannot tell a person that if you haven't eaten 30 pounds (of contaminated fish) in 30 years, you're OK," he said.

There is no acceptable level for PCBs — only an amount that can be tolerated by the general population — said Judy Foulke of the federal Food and Drug Administration, which determines nutrition standards.

Foulke called the level of contaminants found in the fish "a substantial health issue."

"Those readings are 18-fold higher than what the FDA calls a tolerable level," she said.

Yet she said there is no way to

quantify how much tainted fish would be likely to cause illness, since the impact of the chemicals would depend on a person's age, weight, overall diet and health status.

Dozens of people have typically fished at New Market Pond each day, said Piscataway Recreation Director Kevin Donovan. Donovan said the pond is the only fishing spot open to the public in the township.

Generations of anglers may have been affected by the contaminants, according to Bob Spiegel, director of the Edison Wetlands Association.

"That site has been contaminated for 30 years. The possibility that people have been eating this fish for a very long time has to be taken into consideration," said Spiegel.

Spiegel said that swales behind the Hamilton Industrial Park still contain PCB-laden capacitors manufactured by Cornell-Dubilier Electronics, which operated on the site from 1936 to 1962.

EPA spokesman Rich Cahill said it cannot be assumed that Cornell-Dubilier caused the contamination on or off the site. He said the agency is investigating the company's possible role in polluting the property and the waterways where contamination has been found.

With the site expected to be placed on the National Priorities List next month, a study of soil, ground water and surface water will be conducted to assess the extent of contamination, said Peter Mannino, who will coordinate EPA remediation.

Mannino said the scope of the cleanup will depend on the results of tests of sediment from the brook and pond, as well as in Spring Lake in South Plainfield and the Green Brook, which borders Green Brook.

Residents who believe they have been exposed to contaminated fish are encouraged to call Artie Block of the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Diseases Registry at (732) 906-6931.

Normal average 73
High this month ..95(August 17)
Low this month53(August 9)
Precipitation:
Yesterday0.13"

WEATHER ELSEWHERE Today's

NATION	HI	Lo	W	
Anchorage	67	49	pc	Milwaukee
Atlanta	92	72	pc	Minneapolis
Baltimore	85	63	t	Nashville
Billings	79	56	pc	New Orleans
Boston	75	59	pc	Norfolk
Buffalo	74	53	s	Orlando
Chicago	74	55	s	Phoenix
Cincinnati	82	60	pc	Pittsburgh
Cleveland	74	54	pc	Reno
Dallas	94	73	pc	St. Louis
Denver	88	57	pc	San Antonio
Detroit	75	54	s	San Diego
Honolulu	88	73	s	San Francisco
Houston	96	72	pc	Seattle
Indianapolis	82	59	pc	Tampa
Los Angeles	80	58	s	Tucson
Miami	91	79	pc	Washington

Weather (W): s-sunny; pc-partly cloudy; c-cloudy; sh-s-

LOT

August 17, 1997

NJ NY

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'I'M HAPPY TO SEE THESE CHARGES'

Reputed mobster faces another sentencing